Realms of Horror

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Distributed to the book trade in the United States by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Ltd.

Distributed to the toy and hobby trade by regional distributors.

Distributed in the United Kingdom by TSR UK Ltd,

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FOB 756
LakeGeneva,
WI 53147

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The Mill, Rathmore Road
Cambridge CB1 4AD
United Kingdom

ISBN 0-88038-486-7

Sample file

Chapter 1: General Judging Notes

About the Presentation

The information needed to run this adventure is presented in the same way for each section and part of a section. The various features are given below.

Boxed Text

This is material meant to be read to the players unless specific circumstances in your game prevent their knowing the information given. In general, boxed text gives what the characters could see, hear, or otherwise perceive before actually beginning to explore the area. Indoor and nighttime descriptions were written assuming that the adventurers are using a torch or lantern to see by, thus illuminating a 30-foot radius area. Sometimes boxed text is used to explain or accompany an illustration that is meant to be shown to players.

For example, boxed text for a room might give a brief description of the room's contents as seen from the doorway; this would include any visible inhabitants. Another example of boxed text is introductory material that sets the stage for subsequent play.

NPC and Monster Statistics

The inhabitants of an encounter area are summarized within the DM text for that area. The statistics for these inhabitants are given in paragraphs with all lines but the first indented on the left side. The stats are presented in the same order in all cases, separated by semicolons. This order is given below, with the abbreviations used explained. Spells and special equipment are given below the stats.

Name (number): AC (armor class); MV (movement in inches); HD (hit dice) or Profession and level; hp (hit points); #AT (number of attacks); D (damage done for each attack); AL (alignment); SA (special attack type); SD (special defense type),

DM Judging Text

This text is printed in standard paragraph format. The first paragraphs of an encounter area's judging text most often provide general information about the area itself that is not readily apparent to the player characters.

The next paragraphs explain the area's peculiarities. They could detail the reaction of the area's inhabitants to various party behaviors. Traps or tricks are described in these paragraphs, and treasure is detailed in the same way.

Specific References

Whenever the judging text refers to other chapters or parts of this product, *italics* are used.

Named Spells and Magical Items

The names of spells and magical items are printed in *italics.* Their effects are usually not detailed, that information being readily available in the *Player's Handbook, Dungeon Master's Guide,* and similar reference works.

General Notes on Judging the Outcome

Ability Checks

Occasionally, the judging text calls for Dexterity, Constitution, Charisma, or Strength Checks. When this occurs, the player whose character is in question rolls 1d20. If the roll is less than or equal to the statistic named, the check is successful. The effects of success and failure are explained in each case.

Cumulative Chances

At times, the judging text gives a "cumulative chance" that something occurs. This means that each time a roll is made, the chance becomes greater. For example, there is a 5% cumulative chance for each turn a character sits under a palm tree that a coconut falls on his head. During the first turn there is a 5% chance, the second a 10% chance, the third a 15% chance, and so on.

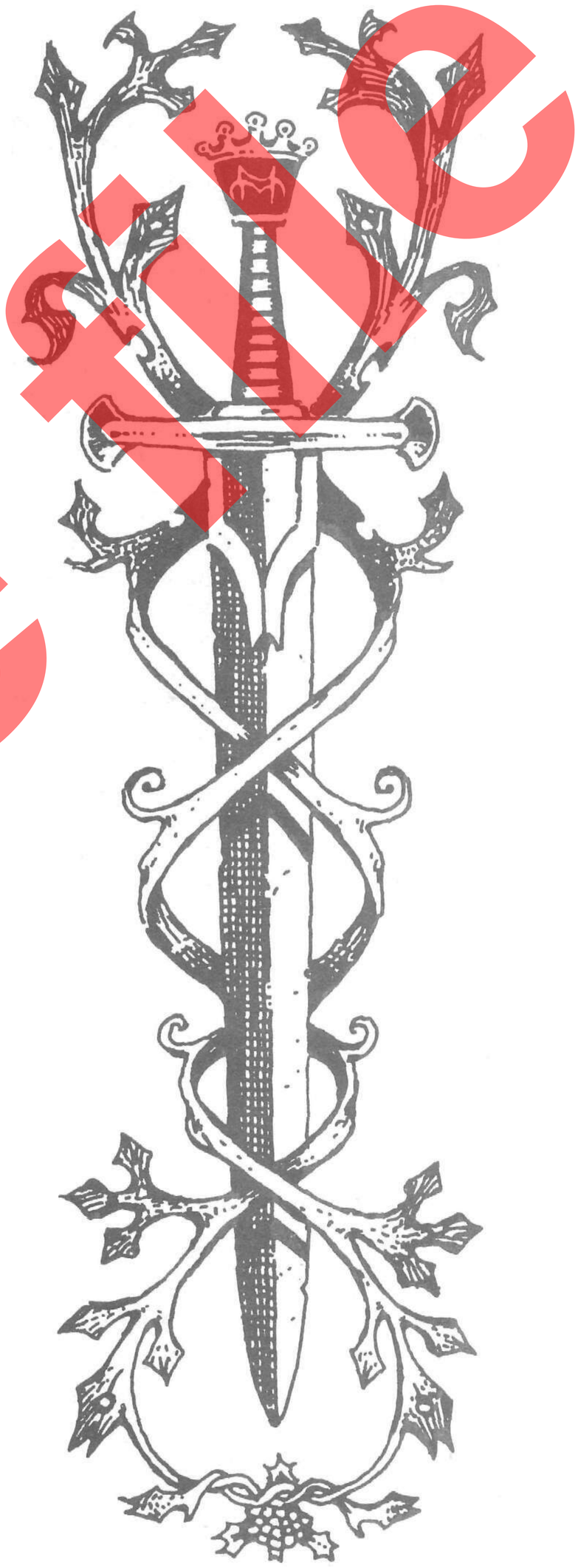
Traps

Many traps inflict damage through ordinary weapons, such as a spear or a dart. When judging these traps, first see how many objects hit a particular PC, then roll to determine how many do damage, and then roll for the damage itself. Within each trap description is an explanation of which dice to roll, including the THACO of the weapons and the damage they inflict.

Other traps inflict damage magically. In this case, the judging notes give the method for determining damage and the applicable saving throw (if any). Some areas contain complex magical spells and traps. To make the game flow more smoothly, you should pay special attention to these areas before playing those sections.

Duplicated Encounter Areas

Certain encounter areas, both in the wilderness and in the tombs and crypts, are duplicates of other areas. Areas that are exactly alike usually have the same map number. There is only one text description to use for each of these areas.



Sample

Part 1

Tomb of Horrors

by Gary Gygax

Sample file

Chapter 2: Adventure Judging Notes

This is a thinking person's adventure, and if your group is a hack and slash gathering, they will be unhappy! If this is the case, it is better to skip this dungeon, rather than to have to tell them there are but few monsters. If, however, you regularly pose problems to be solved by brains and not brawn, your players will find this adventure to their liking.

General Judging Notes

Please read and review all the material in this adventure and become thoroughly familiar with it before beginning play. You will note from the text whether or not an adventure area has one or more illustrations found in the accompanying *Illustration Booklet.* Read aloud the boxed text, but never give any additional information that the PCs would have no way of knowing. Avoid facial expressions or voice tones that might give helpful hints or mislead players. The real enjoyment of this adventure is for the players to cope with the problems on their own, and those who manage to do so even semi-successfully appreciate your refereeing properly, allowing them to live or die on their own.

Passage of Time

Negotiation of the Tomb requires some time, so be prepared to spend several sessions with this adventure. When the game ends for the day, assume the expedition is spending the intervening time until play begins again resting and recovering. Allowing one day of game time to pass in the dungeon for every day of real time that passes between play sessions gives PCs a chance to recover some lost hit points, too.

Wandering Monsters

No wandering monsters occur in the Tomb itself, and none frequent the area around it. Because this is so, the party might be allowed to camp close to its entrance without fear of random encounters. If you choose this to be the case, do not inform your players of this, and make random dice rolls to throw them off the track.

Ethereal and Astral Characters

If any character becomes ethereal or astral within the Tomb, check once per *round* for wandering demons. A Type I-IV demon will attack the ethereal or astral character on a roll of 1 on 1d6, The attack stops when the PC returns to the Prime Material.

Pit Traps

All pit traps throughout the Tomb, except where noted to the contrary, are concealed by a counter-weighted trap door that opens as soon as any person steps on it. Thrusting with force upon these trap doors with a pole reveals them 1-4 on 1d6. They may be discovered in other ways as with other traps.

Those who step upon one of the concealed trap doors fall into the pit unless they pass a special saving throw based on their Dexterity. Unlike normal saving throws, this one is made on percentile dice (D100). PCs have a 1% chance to save per point of Dexterity, with an additional 1% for each point above 12. Thus, a character with Dex 16 has a 20% chance to save (16% for the Dex of 16 plus 4% for the 4 points above 12).

The pit is 10 feet deep with five iron spikes at the bottom, each coated with poison. Roll 1d6 to determine how many spikes wound the victim; a roll of 1-3 indicates the number of spike wounds that occur, and a roll of 4-6 indicates that the spikes missed the falling PC. For characters that fall, give 1d6 points of falling damage, plus 1d6 of damage for each spike wound. For each spike wound, the PC must pass a saving throw vs. poison or die in agony within three turns.

Trapped False Doors

Throughout the Tomb there are false doors that screen a spear trap. These locations are noted with a special symbol.

When one of these doors is opened, a spear shoots out from the wall behind the door, flying a maximum of 30 feet unless stopped by another wall . . . or an unfortunate PC. The spears are magically guided toward living being, striking with a THACO of 12 and doing 2d8 damage points. When the door is closed and re-opened, another spear fires.

Because the spears are magically guided, the door opener(s) or any others standing before it are subject to be struck. To judge this, determine where each PC was when the door was opened. Determine at random which character is the target if it is not clear who the target is.

The trap may not be discovered from the corridor, but the faint magic that operates the spears may be.

Maps, Illustrations, and Inscriptions

Maps

There is only one map for this adventure, and it is Map 1-1 in the *Map Booklet.* To successfully map this area, your players will need a sheet of graph paper 35 squares wide by 43 squares deep. It would be best if you provided the graph paper for them, but give no indication of the proper position on the paper for them to begin mapping. The map in the *Map Booklet is* oriented with north toward the top. The scale is one square equals 10 feet.

Though the master map is shown all on one piece of paper, the text divides the adventure areas into three parts: Entrance Level, False Crypt Level, and Tomb of Acererak Level. The numbering of the adventure areas is continuous to make correlating with the master map easier.

Illustrations

An illustration section was designed for use with this adventure, and it may be found in the accompanying *Illustration Booklet.* It contains 32 illustrations showing various features of the Tomb.

When you come across a notation that an illustration exists, you should show the appropriate illustration(s) to your players. Each illustration has a number that corresponds to the adventure area numbers in the text and to the location on the master map. Not all adventure areas have illustrations, and some areas have more than one. The text states very clearly when to use an illustration, and which illustration to use.

When using the *Illustration Booklet,* you should fold the pages back so that only the appropriate illustration is shown to your players. If there are two illustrations on a single page, cover the unused one with a doubled up sheet of paper. You can place a finger or thumb over the illustration's number to avoid giving the players clues to the number of the room or its location.

Inscription

Also in the *Inscription and Map Booklet* is a reproduction of the message left by Acererak in the mosaic floor of the True Entrance Corridor. This is Inscription 1A.

Character Roster

Number of Characters

The *Tomb of Horrors* was designed for 4 to 10 characters of levels 10-14. It is recommended that the party be balanced in class, including druids, illusionists, paladins, and rangers among the group. Each character should have magical armor and a magical weapon, as well as some sort of miscellaneous magic.

It is difficult for the best of players to handle three characters at once, especially if the characters are not those created by the players. We recommend that you allow no more than two PCs per player, and if you have six or more players, each should have but a single character.

Sample file

Characters from Ongoing Campaigns

Your players are free, of course, to take their own characters into the Tomb should you decide to incorporate this adventure into an ongoing campaign. If this is the case, the characters should be of levels 10 to 14, and they should have relatively high power.

If your PCs are considerably weaker than those given in the Character Roster, you should consider either delaying play of this adventure until your PCs are stronger, or offering assistance from some NPC. If the party is relatively small and of lesser levels, have the NPC give each PC a magical item of about +2 strength.

A local baron could want to build a summer castle at the Tomb's location, for example, and would offer to give some magic items to your party if they clean the area up. Other similar ideas readily suggest themselves with a little careful thought, but care should be taken to mesh the scenario with your campaign before you incorporate it. Make no mistake: the Tomb is a deadly place, and there is a very great probability of favored PCs perishing.

To sweeten the pot, however, we suggest that you reward successful completion of the mission (destroying the demi-lich Acererak) with 100,000 experience points. This award takes into consideration all the difficulties within the Tomb to gain the crypt and destroy the demi-lich Acererak. Reward partial completion based on this number. Add an additional 1 experience point for each 2 gp worth of treasure removed.

Magic Required for Success

Killing Acererak, the demi-lich, is a difficult job. Only the following spells have any effect: *forget, shatter, exorcise, dispel evil,* and *holy word.* The demi-lich may be destroyed by a *power word—kill* spell, but the magic-user must be either astral or ethereal when the spell is cast to have any effect at all. *Vorpal blades* can do damage, as can +5 *weapons* or *swords of sharpness.* Paladins using +4 *weapons* also have an effect. No other magic or weapons damage the skull of the demi-lich.

This should be considered in equipping the party, though you should not tell the players what spells or items to take. Have at least one of the effective weapons available to the PCs of an ongoing campaign, should they not already have one, but make it cost them something they value. A usable weapon and scroll are available within the Tomb itself, as are gems that a thief can use as sling stones.

Adjusting for Player Skill

If your *players* are not experts, we suggest that you allow each PC an additional potion, with the exception of *giant strength* and *oil of etherealness.* You should also provide one of the clerics with a scroll of three or four clerical spells.

If your players are few and their skill level is near novice, and if you do not believe they can handle multiple characters, give them each a magical item from the list above. Then, add 1 experience level to the levels given on the roster. Do the same with total novices, but give them each a man-at-arms to act as a torch bearer and pack carrier.



Chapter 3: Setting the Stage

Locating the Dungeon

You may locate this adventure in *The WORLD OF GREYHAWK*™ Campaign Setting, in *The FORGOTTEN REALMS*™, Campaign Setting in your own campaign world, or nowhere at all if you choose. Setting the stage for the location you use depends in large part on what you choose.

Should you choose to locate the Tomb in Greyhawk, there are several possibilities for its locale. These include:

1. The highest hill on the Plains of Iuz.
2. An unmapped island in the Nyr Dyv.
3. In the Bright Desert.
4. At the western border of the Duchy of Geoff.
5. Somewhere in the Vast Swamp south of Sundi.
6. On an island beyond the realm of the Sea Barons.

You may, if you choose to, locate this dungeon in The Forgotten Realms, or you may locate this adventure in your own campaign world. Should you do so, be sure to locate it fairly distant from known habitation, but not so far that rumors of its existence cannot reasonably be known or told to the PCs. Furthermore, this adventure may be played successfully as a one-shot exercise, not tied into any campaign or game world setting.

Background, Legends, and Rumors

The following background, legend, and rumors may be used to help dispense information gathered from sages and from *legend lore* spells.

Background

Ages past, a human magic-user/cleric of surpassing evil took the steps necessary to preserve his life-force beyond the centuries he had already lived, and this creature became the lich, Acererak. Over the scores of years which followed, the lich dwelled with hordes of ghastly servants in the gloomy stone walls of the very hill where the Tomb is. Eventually, even the undead life force of Acererak began to wane, and so for the next eight decades, he bade his servants to create the Tomb of Horrors.

Self-resetting traps were built into the plan, traps so deadly that they could snuff the life from even the most experienced adventurer at once. Enchanted creatures, not many, were left in key places.

To satisfy some perverse whim, however, Acererak added bits of information that would lure grave-robbers to their deaths. He also enchanted a good-aligned siren, and imprisoned her within a grotto. All of this was intended to give him the utmost pleasure of watching the deaths of those who had almost found his vault,

When his Tomb was complete, he destroyed all his slaves and servitors, magically hid the entrance to his halls, and went to his final haunt, while his soul roamed strange planes unknown to even the wisest of sages.

Two keys are needed to gain entrance to the vault wherein lie the treasure and remains of Acererak. Yet these keys also carry warnings to him. Joining together the halves of the golden First Key calls his soul back to the Prime Material Plane. Using the Second Key alerts him that he must be prepared to do battle in order to survive yet more centuries.

All that now remains of Acererak are the dust of his bones and his skull. These rest in the far recesses of the vault that also holds his treasure. Now a demi-lich, Acererak does not have the power he once had as a lich, yet he is not without power. If his dust or his skull is attacked, he can retaliate devastatingly. And he will . . . yes, he will.

Legend of the Tomb

Somewhere under a lost and lonely hill of grim and foreboding aspect lies a labyrinthine crypt. To slay the unwary and uninvited, it is filled with terrible traps and not a few strange and ferocious monsters. They guard rich treasures, both precious and magical.

Be warned that the tomb was built by the demi-lich Acererak, who still wards his final haunt. This being is said to be possessed of powers that make him nearly undefeatable. By all accounts, it is quite unlikely that any adventurers ever find the chamber where his bones lie, for the passages and rooms of the Tomb are fraught with terrible traps, poison gases, and magical protections. Furthermore, Acererak has so well hidden his crypt that even those who avoid the pitfalls are not likely to locate it.

Parties large and well-prepared have boasted that they would relieve his tomb of its treasure, but these have not been heard of since they set off. Thus, only the bravest and strongest should even consider the attempt, and if they do locate the Tomb, they must be prepared to fail.

Rumors and Riddles

Use the following as information that may be gained as rumors in areas close to the Tomb, from arcane works of ancient lore, from learned sages, or from *legend lore* spells.

1. Look not into the eyes of the Tomb of Acererak.
2. The wise use wits.
   All others die
   In lich's Tomb
   Beneath the sky.
3. Acererak still wanders the passages of his tomb, setting traps to kill the unwary.
4. The Keys you need,
   They you must use.
   Unlock the door,
   Surprise you lose.
5. A vorpal blade or sharpness carry,
   If against the lich you venture.
   Forget or shatter by the wary,
   Holy spells for this adventure.
6. Her call your ship to rock walls break.
   Your call her help your fortune make.

Starting Play

The material presented here assumes that the PCs have already gathered all the background information that they can and have traveled to the Tomb's location. When this adventure was played at Origins I, referees were instructed that the hill had been found in the Vast Swamp, and that the party had arrived there in barges.

The Hill of the Skull

> Before you is a low, flat-topped hill, about 200 yards wide and 300 yards long. Only ugly weeds, thorns, and briars grow upon the steep hillsides and top of this 60-foot-high mound.
>
> Atop the hill are black rocks, spaced and shaped so that they look like the eye-sockets, nose hole, and grinning jagged teeth of an enormous death's head, accentuated by the overall shape of the hill.

The rocks that form the "skull's features" atop the hill are exposed outcrops of the hard stone that caps the softer stone from which the Tomb was hollowed out. This stone may be described as dark grey-black, with a very dense structure. A dwarf or gnome has a 50% chance to recognize that it would be *very* resistant to weathering.

The sod that grows on the hilltop is only inches thick, and the vines and brambles that grow from it have thin purchase there. A druid has a 50% chance to know that the hill was once bald, and the plants that grow there now have gradually covered it over, probably within the past several hundred years.

Only a search of the hill slopes reveals anything unusual. Whereas the hillslopes to the east, south, and west are steep, they are formed from the dark grey-black stone that outcrops on top. The slope to the north, however, is different, as described below.

Sample file